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'The ultimate masters of the city': police, public order and the poor in colonial Bombay, c. 1893-1914

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I. Introduction

- 1 It is now widely accepted that, historically, 'order maintenance' rather than crime prevention has constituted the 'core mandate' of modern policing³. Historians have highlighted the manner in which the police responded to this imperative in diverse political contexts, both metropolitan and colonial, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries⁴. This essay focuses on urban policing in colonial Bombay during the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, a period when the port town was transformed into a major industrial metropolis. The outbreak of large-scale urban riots during the 1890s, in conjunction with the rapid growth of an unregulated proletarian 'secondary economy' and public culture centred on the street, rendered Bombay's colonial rulers increasingly apprehensive about the threat posed to 'public order' by industrial urbanization and massive labour migration. The essay examines how the anxieties provoked by a swiftly changing urban environment prompted a reappraisal of colonial policing strategies and assesses the consequences of their responses for the maintenance of public order.
- 2 In recent years, studies of the colonial police in British India have underscored its relative weaknesses as an instrument of social control⁵. Accounts of colonial policing in rural India, for instance, have noted that 'the growth of the police was continually handicapped by the financial considerations of Imperial rule'. Consequently, 'their numbers and reach were limited' and forced them to rely on 'local allies who were also the local controllers'⁶. Similar constraints have also been highlighted by studies of urban policing under the Raj⁷. A recent account of 'everyday policing' in colonial Bombay has noted that the 'daily operations of the police were determined by the financial and political constraints within which they developed'. Furthermore, the police 'operated less as simply an instrument of social control, but proved more responsive to influences which were relatively autonomous of their own internal structure of command' and hence could not 'fulfil their disciplinary, even coercive, function systematically'. At the same time, 'at lesser levels, albeit less systematically, the working classes too could draw upon, appropriate and deploy their personal and social caste and kinship connections with the police'⁸. This perspective has served as a useful corrective to institutional approaches that tended to portray the colonial police as a 'monolithic' instrument of coercion, which was external to local society⁹. Yet the analytical pendulum has now swung to the other extreme. Thus, if earlier studies of the colonial police perceived it as emblematic of an omnipotent colonial state, the revisionist view emphasises the 'fragility of its control'. In the process, some accounts within the revisionist framework are inclined to overstate the weaknesses of the colonial police and the extent to which it became 'imprisoned' within the confines of local networks of power in particular urban contexts¹⁰. Further, in highlighting processes of mutual accommodation and reciprocity, there is a tendency to play down the conflictual logic that governed the relationship between the colonial police and the urban working classes. However, as a recent social history of North Indian towns in the late colonial period has shown, while a lack of numbers precluded 'intensive policing on a regular basis', everyday relations between the colonial police and the poor were marked by persistent antagonism and friction¹¹.

- 3 This essay seeks to argue that the institutional weaknesses that impelled the police to expand its network of local allies in turn of the century Bombay were offset by a widening of its regulatory and coercive powers *vis-à-vis* a range of sites and activities within an emergent 'proletarian public sphere'. In particular, the essay highlights the significance of a new police act, introduced in 1902, which rendered the police an increasingly obtrusive presence in the social relations of the street and the urban neighbourhood. The wide discretionary powers granted to the police by the new act, in a context where its very institutional limitations precluded a comprehensive and consistent enforcement of the law, served especially to amplify the scale and dimensions of the potential friction between the police and the urban poor in the years leading up to the First World War.

II. Fin de siècle Bombay: A 'Crisis' of Urban Order

- 4 By the last decade of the nineteenth century, colonial Bombay had experienced a century of sustained growth that had transformed it from a pestilential, swamp-ridden port town into a city that vied with Calcutta for the title of *urbs prima in Indis*. It was not only an important commercial and financial junction between a vast regional hinterland and the capitalist world economy, but also the locus of a major cotton-textile industry that was founded and dominated by Indian entrepreneurship. The rapid extension of the cotton mills from the 1870s onwards, in particular, had a major impact on the urban economy. Alongside the textile factories sprang up a range of ancillary small industries and workshops that sought to cater to its needs. Many small workshops serviced the cotton mills by undertaking maintenance and repair of machinery, while there were other economic activities, such as the retail sector of the cloth market including tailoring and dressmaking, whose fortunes were vitally affected by the textile industry¹². At the same time, the last quarter of the nineteenth century also witnessed the emergence of several other types of industrial activity. In particular, there was a proliferation in the number of small-scale manufacturing enterprises catering to the varied demands of a burgeoning metropolis¹³.
- 5 Bombay's rapid industrial growth during the late nineteenth century drew an ever-increasing number of rural migrants to the city. Initially, a significant proportion of these migrants were drawn from its immediate hinterland within the Bombay Presidency¹⁴. Their ranks were reinforced by streams of migration from north India, which commenced in the 1880s and then accelerated in the early twentieth century¹⁵. A majority of these migrants were employed on a casual basis in the cotton-textile industry as well as the small manufacturing units and workshops that evaded the regulations of the Factory Act¹⁶. There were also general labouring jobs to be found in the docks, the building trade, the cotton godowns, markets and warehouses, the various retail trades as well as the various public agencies such as the railways, tramways and the municipality¹⁷.
- 6 Despite the quickening pace of industrial development and the growing influx of rural migrants, the city's British rulers did not experience any major threat to 'public order' prior to the last decade of the nineteenth century. As one historian has noted, such incidents of group violence as had occurred in the city before the 1890s were largely small-scale, confined to the 'internal social world' of the neighbourhood and the participants who were involved in them 'operated within a reasonably narrow territorial space'. Thus, instances of group violence had posed no real danger to urban order in the city at large and 'the bulk of the evidence suggests for Bombay urban society considerable insularity and a disjunction from the Imperial presence'¹⁸.
- 7 During the 1890s, however, the city's ruling authorities were confronted with two major urban riots that were not only unprecedented in the scale and intensity of the violence but also in terms of their wider political implications. The first of these occurred on 11 August 1893, when a sectarian affray between some Hindus and Muslims in the vicinity of the Jama Masjid escalated into a full-blown conflagration that engulfed large parts of the city. According to official estimates, eighty people were killed and five hundred and thirty wounded in the violence that accompanied the riots¹⁹. Over fifteen hundred arrests on grounds of 'unlawful assembly' were made before the riots were finally suppressed. The three days of rioting, the *Bombay Gazette* declared, had been 'made memorable in local history by the destruction of temples and of

mosques, and the looting of shops, to the accompaniment of fierce faction fights in the streets, varied with senseless assaults on the police and the military'. There were no instances in the history of the city over the past half century, it added, 'of more serious riots, considering the area over which they extended and the enormous numbers of people who took part in them'²⁰.

8 The other major riot of the decade occurred at the height of the colonial state's frenzied attempts to suppress a major plague epidemic that broke out in the city during the late 1890s. On 9 March 1898, a search party looking for concealed plague victims in the Julaha (community of Muslim weavers from North India) *moholla* (neighbourhood) in Madanpura (a Muslim-dominated locality in the Indian part of the city) attempted to remove a young girl who had supposedly contracted the disease. The search party encountered stiff resistance and soon the police were called into quell the tumult. The decision of an official present at the spot to open fire on the crowd of protesting weavers rapidly turned the affray into a riot that once again engulfed the Indian town²¹. The protestors were joined by a large number of Maratha mill workers who were roaming about the streets in the aftermath of the Holi (the Hindu spring festival in which participants sprinkle coloured powder on one another) revelry²². The rampaging crowds proceeded to attack the local jail and fire station²³. In other places, Europeans were set upon by angry mobs²⁴.

9 The riots of 1893 and the popular protest against the plague measures rendered colonial authorities increasingly anxious about their ability to prevent conflicts from breaching the bounds of the neighbourhood and engulfing the city at large. One source of concern for the city's rulers stemmed from the widespread participation in the riots of the city's largely Marathi-speaking industrial workforce massed together in the vicinity of the textile mills on the northern outskirts of the city²⁵. 'They live mostly together in large chawls beyond the city proper, where the Police is weakest', noted a police report barely a month after the August riots, 'and in case they should resort to violence in lieu of argument the danger to the public peace will be very serious'²⁶. The riots had also occurred at a time when the city's textile industry experienced what one contemporary described as a prolonged 'strike mania', with workers in many individual mills striking work over wage reductions²⁷. As the official historian of the city police noted, these strikes were the first 'of any magnitude that occurred in the industrial area' and necessitated the posting of police parties in the mill districts 'in order to guard mill property and quell possible disorder'²⁸. Following these strikes, colonial authorities grew increasingly concerned about the threat that disruption of work in the cotton mills posed to urban law and order and responded readily to requests for assistance from employers of labour²⁹.

10 The sectarian character of the 1893 riots also evoked fears about the increasing number of migrants from northern India, supposedly imbued with a primordial religious fanaticism that rendered them a 'dangerous' element within the city³⁰. In the future, the civil servant James Campbell warned, the influx of North Indians, 'the thousands of Pathans, Afghans, Sidis, Arabs and Persians, all fighting men and many of them reckless', was likely to cause problems for urban authorities³¹. Interestingly, Campbell presided over the Bombay Plague Committee in March 1898 when the resistance of the Julaha weavers to the plague search party ignited the riot in Madanpura. In his account of the riot, Campbell was quick to remind the government that the Julahas, 'have for years been known to be excitable and somewhat disaffected', and that they were 'the most dangerous classes of rioters in 1893'³².

11 The participation of the poor in the urban riots was not the only source of anxiety for Bombay's ruling authorities during the 1890s. An equally significant cause for concern was an emergent proletarian casual economy and public culture centred on the street. The presence of a large working-class population in the city, a major proportion of which was employed on a casual basis, was accompanied by the rapid expansion of a 'secondary economy of the street' geared towards servicing its material needs. This secondary economy of the working classes was not only a source of employment, housing, credit and the necessities of daily life, but also catered to the sexual needs of predominantly male migrants who had left their families behind in the village. It was, as in other large cities of the time, a largely unregulated domain characterised by 'low costs, low overheads, and irregular hours of provision', and encompassed 'the street

hawker, the street market, the pawnshop, the fence' as well as cheap hotels, liquor shops, lodging houses and brothels³³. Significantly, the rhythms of the secondary economy in Bombay were crucially shaped by the strategies of capital, which 'engendered a fluctuating demand for labour, hastening its turnover and instability, and committed and exposed a large number of job seekers involuntarily to the uncertainties of the casual labour market'³⁴.

12 Simultaneously, this secondary economy was paralleled by the rise of a proletarian public culture based on patterns of informal association and sociability centred on the street³⁵. In part, this development was an outcome of the housing shortages and massive overcrowding that forced a majority of the urban poor to live on the city's footpaths³⁶. But, as Chandavarkar has pointed out, 'The importance of the street did not derive simply from the fact that men lived on it'. Rather, the street was also the principal locus of working class social life and recreational activities, ranging from the plebeian *akharas* (gymnasia) and *tamashas* (street theatre) to the liquor shops where many workers congregated after work³⁷.

13 For colonial authorities this proletarian casual economy and culture centred on the street came to represent a potential threat to public order on account of the widely entrenched perception that it was characterized by a culture of 'roughness'. As has been noted by historians in recent times, colonial discourse frequently attributed an innate lawlessness and violence to the working classes on account of 'their rural origins, their status as casual labour and their incomplete adaptation to the industrial setting'³⁸. Many contemporary observers in Bombay, for instance, attributed the looting and destruction that accompanied the riots of the 1890s to the activities of unemployed and violent *budmashes* (criminals) that loafed about the streets³⁹. Similarly, places where the urban poor gravitated after work, especially liquor shops, brothels, *akharas* and *talims* (gymnasia), came to be seen as sites of latent disorderliness and violence⁴⁰.

14 By the last decade of the nineteenth century colonial authorities also began to register a growing concern about the conduct of the annual Muslim festival of Muharram. The ten-day long festival, recalling the martyrdom of Husain at Kerbala, was one of mourning for Bombay's Shi'as (one of the two principal sects within Islam). But it was the carnivalesque Sunni (the other major sect within Islam) mode of celebration, centering on the parading of large wooden models of the mausoleum of Hussain at Karbala, known as *ta'ziyas* or *tabuts*, and accompanied by wandering *tolis* (street gangs) that was more prominent in the city during the late nineteenth century⁴¹. Each street or neighbourhood had its own *toli*, largely comprising of youths drawn from the labouring classes irrespective of their religious affiliation⁴². The size of the *tolis* varied depending on the affluence of the neighbourhood and the fund-raising abilities of its leaders⁴³. The clowns, mimics and acrobats that accompanied the *tolis* accentuated the carnivalesque character of the festival, 'the like of which for extent and eccentricity, is to be found in few other cities in the world'⁴⁴. The Muharram festivities had been relatively free of violence for the better part of the nineteenth century, but during the 1890s an intensification of inter-neighbourhood competition and rivalry as well as the growing size of the street gangs 'raised the specter of a threat to general stability' in the official mind⁴⁵.

15 Urban street life also became the focus of colonial anxieties for other reasons during the late 1890s. Fears began to be entertained about the presence of officially defined 'criminal classes' and 'criminal tribes' that supposedly infested the city's streets⁴⁶. Bombay was said to be 'well represented in the matter of members belonging to the criminal classes and foreigners' since it was 'a haven of refuge and an emporium of labour for such people'⁴⁷. Moreover, as famine and then epidemic diseases ravaged many rural districts of western India during the last decade of the nineteenth century, colonial officials also grew alarmed about the influx of 'beggars', 'vagrants' and 'pauper immigrants' who were perceived to be repositories of disease and imbued with criminal tendencies⁴⁸. Indeed, T.S. Weir, the city's Health Officer, was convinced that, 'the criminal, the destitute, the diseased in every land of India, in easy communication with Bombay, even as distant as Upper India, trudge here in the hope of an easy sustenance'⁴⁹. A view endorsed by the police commissioner who noted that such people were 'as a rule extremely filthy in their habits', 'afflicted with loathsome deformities' and repositories of 'infectious diseases'⁵⁰. In the context of the anxieties aroused by the plague epidemic, colonial

officials increasingly favoured summarily deporting such 'destitute immigrants' from the city⁵¹.

III. A 'Limited Raj'?

- 16 The tensions of the 1890s rendered Bombay's rulers increasingly anxious about the preservation of 'public order' in a rapidly changing urban environment. One response of the colonial authorities in such circumstances was to effect changes aimed at buttressing the numerical strength of the police and improving their discipline in order to render them a more reliable tool of social control. Originating as an armed local militia in the late eighteenth century, Bombay's police force acquired its modern form in the mid-nineteenth century⁵². Police organization in the city, headed by a commissioner, was modelled loosely along the lines of the London Metropolitan Police. But for the better part of the late nineteenth century, the force was 'half the strength of Calcutta and considerably weaker than London'⁵³. Moreover, the long hours of work and the low rates of pay combined to act as a strong deterrent when it came to recruitment into the police force among the local population⁵⁴. Indeed, desertions from the lower ranks of the force were a common occurrence during times of buoyancy in the urban economy.
- 17 From the 1890s onwards the issue of police reorganization, especially the augmentation of its numerical strength, began to attract sustained official attention. Thus, while there had been a decrease in the size of the force during the two decades between 1865 and 1885⁵⁵, numbers almost doubled in the last decade of the nineteenth century⁵⁶. In particular, the armed mounted police was trebled in the wake of the 1893 riots in order to provide a reserve force during future emergencies. Piecemeal increments to the size of the force were introduced during the following decade too, usually prompted by major episodes of urban rioting. Misgivings about the efficiency and reliability of the Bombay police, highlighted by the findings of the Police Commission of 1902-03, also directed attention to the vexed question of organizational reforms. In 1908, following a series of riots, the provincial government appointed a committee to investigate the functioning of the city's police force. The Morison committee noted in its report that Bombay not only lacked adequately equipped police stations, but that the apparatus for the investigation of crime at the divisional level was also ineffectual. It also pointed out that the systems of control that were in place were inefficient because of 'an absence of educated men in the ranks of the native constables and jemadars', as well as the inability of the European officers to exercise proper supervision since they did not 'know the language of the people of the City as well as they ought to'. No increase in the numerical strength of the police, the Committee argued, would be of any use 'unless the control from above is made much more efficient from the top downwards'⁵⁷.
- 18 S.M. Edwardes, a member of the committee who subsequently became the city's police commissioner, was entrusted with the task of devising a reorganization scheme that would remedy these institutional defects. Edwardes proposed a number of reforms, the most significant involving the introduction of modern methods of crime registration in newly designed police stations manned by a superior and subordinate investigating agency⁵⁸. He also advocated replacing the old fixed point system of crime investigation with a new system based on regular patrolling of the streets. His scheme entailed a total increase of 1,639 policemen to the force in order to make the system practicable and would have ensured 'a proportion roughly of one policeman to every 247 of population'⁵⁹. However, as historians have noted, financial constraints consistently precluded any major attempt at police reorganization and reform⁶⁰. Inevitably, Edwardes' ambitious proposals were whittled down under official strictures on the need for 'economy' and a subsequent reorganization scheme mooted in 1918 found the commissioner of police rehearsing the familiar litany of woes: there was a 'greater strain' on the urban police on account of the 'increased work thrown on the force as a direct result of the shortage of men'; the force was accepting 'recruits of lower physical standard in order to cope with vacancies', the men were underfed 'owing to dearness of all commodities', and a majority of the policemen lived in insanitary housing since they were 'still unprovided with lines'⁶¹.

- 19 Alongside the piecemeal attempts at police reorganization and reform, the upheavals of the 1890s also forced colonial authorities to reassess their relationship with the urban neighbourhoods. Prior to the last decade of the nineteenth century, colonial authorities had by and large tended to stay aloof from the affairs of the neighbourhood. 'For much of the time', Ian Catanach has noted, 'the nineteenth century British did not normally see control of the Indian Town as a problem of great consequence'⁶². Formal authority within the urban neighbourhoods had generally been exercised by legitimated structures of ostensibly 'traditional' corporate authority, most notably, caste and community headmen⁶³. Yet until the beginning of the 1890s the colonial administration had maintained only the most 'tenuous and haphazard' links with these 'traditional' sources of authority⁶⁴.
- 20 However, the turbulence of the 1890s prompted the city's ruling authorities to cultivate closer links with those who could be identified as 'leaders' within the localities. Thus, during the plague campaign of the late 1890s an attempt was made to work through the 'natural leaders' of the local communities in the prosecution of plague policies⁶⁵. Yet, as the decade wore on, it also became apparent to colonial officials that the large influx of new migrants into the city had wrought a significant change in the power relations within the neighbourhoods. Power and influence no longer resided solely in the formal, legitimated sources of corporate authority within the neighbourhood, but was increasingly exercised by those who controlled the informal networks of patronage that had begun to coalesce within the proletarian secondary economy and culture of the street during the late nineteenth century. These included jobbers, rent-collectors, petty landlords, Pathan moneylenders, the proprietors of taverns and tea-shops, brothels, gymnasiums and street-bosses of various kinds commonly known as *dadas*⁶⁶.
- 21 Consequently, while the traditionally legitimated structures of corporate authority continued to be utilised, the colonial administration sought increasingly to forge links with some of these new sources of influence. 'When there are possibilities of disturbance in Bombay', revealed S.M. Edwardes, 'the Commissioner of Police calls in to his assistance a class of persons who cannot be called leading citizens, who are often uneducated, who are ordinarily never heard of, and who themselves live in the quarters where the trouble is fomented.' 'Disorder of a violent kind', he argued, 'is not created as a rule by members of the Municipal Corporation; but by the members of a lower stratum, which is rarely seen in society, is largely uneducated, but which controls the bazaar'⁶⁷. At the same time, while the upheavals of the 1890s prompted colonial authorities to shore up their ties with the world of the neighbourhood, a reliance on sources of informal influence was in itself not a sufficient guarantee against disruptions of public order. Indeed, colonial authorities 'often tried to invest those they perceived as neighbourhood leaders with power and influence which they never possessed' and this strategy for the maintenance of public order was 'founded upon shifting sands'⁶⁸.

IV. A new interventionism: the 1902 City Police Act

- 22 Latent anxieties about the reliability of their local networks in the neighbourhood, as well as the perception that a rapidly burgeoning city like Bombay had 'special' requirements, prompted colonial authorities to cast about for other means of securing public order. In a context in which the influence of the traditional neighbourhood leaders were perceived to have been eroded and the newly emerging informal networks of patronage based on the street were not considered entirely reliable, colonial authorities sought to fortify themselves with new, more authoritarian methods of control 'from above'. Most notably, in July 1902 a new piece of legislation was introduced which extended police jurisdiction over a range of activities and sites that had hitherto been outside its purview and concentrated enormous discretionary powers in the hands of the commissioner and his deputies⁶⁹.
- 23 The nature and scope of the provisions that were introduced by the new act for the 'preservation of order' suggest that the developments of the 1890s had registered a significant impact on the official mind. First, the act vested the police with an exhaustive array of 'special powers' for regulating and controlling all collective activities in public spaces that might potentially compromise the 'public peace'. Thus, police officials could now 'direct the conduct of, and behavior or action of persons constituting, processions and assemblies in streets';

'prescribe the routes by which and the times at which any such processions may, or may not pass'; 'prevent obstructions on the occasion of all processions and assemblies and in the neighbourhood of all places of worship'; 'keep order on and in all streets, quays, wharves, landing-places and all other public places or places of public resort'; and 'regulate and control music or singing in any street or public place, and the beating of drums, tom-toms and other instruments and the blowing or sounding of horns or other noisy instruments, in or near any street or public place'⁷⁰.

24 Second, the new act also consolidated and extended the formal powers of regulation and control vested in the police by criminalizing a range of activities in 'public' sites and spaces. In some instances, pre-existing punitive provisions against some categories of offences were rendered even more stringent than before. Especially noteworthy in this regard were the provisions with regard to 'pauper immigrants' and 'beggars'. Those who were arrested under either of these categories now faced a maximum punishment of a one-month prison sentence or a fifty-rupee fine⁷¹. The Act also enabled the police to deport 'pauper immigrants' and persons convicted twice of begging. Any such deported persons who returned to Bombay without the permission of the police could be jailed for up to two years.

25 Furthermore, the very definition of 'public' sites and spaces that were subject to police regulation was rendered as comprehensive as possible. For instance, a 'street' was construed to mean 'any road, footway, square, court, alley or passage, whether a thoroughfare or not, to which the public have a permanently or temporarily a right of access'. Similarly, a place of 'public entertainment' included any 'refreshment-room, eating house, coffee-house, liquor-house, boarding-house, lodging-house, hotel, tavern or wine, beer, spirit, arrack, toddy, ganja, bhang or opium shop'. Likewise, a place of 'public amusement' encompassed 'any place, enclosure, building, tent, booth or other erection, whether permanent or temporary, where music, singing, dancing or any diversion or game... is provided', and included any 'race-course, circus, theatre, music hall, billiard-room, bagatelle-room, gymnasium or fencing school'⁷².

26 Significantly, the new police act vested a range of discretionary powers in the commissioner of police and his subordinates. The most significant of these were in relation to the newly framed 'special orders' for the 'preservation of public order'. Whereas prior to the introduction of the 1902 act the police commissioner could only issue general rules for the conduct of public assemblies and processions, the newly introduced legislation vested him with a detailed and exhaustive list of powers. No collective activity or display in public was now possible without the prior permission of the police. If the police commissioner considered it expedient, he could prohibit 'any assembly or procession whenever and for so long as he considers such prohibition to be necessary for the preservation of the public peace or public safety'⁷³. The commissioner of police was also empowered to prohibit, whenever he deemed fit, 'the carrying of swords, spears, bludgeons, guns, or other offensive weapons, in any public place', 'the public utterance of cries, singing of songs, playing of music' and 'the delivery of harangues, the use of gestures or mimetic representations, and the preparation, exhibition or dissemination of pictures, symbols, placards, or of any other object or thing' that in his view was likely to 'inflame religious animosity or hostility between different classes, or incite to a commission of an offence, to a disturbance of the public peace or to resistance to or contempt of the law'⁷⁴. If he was satisfied that in an 'actual or intended religious or ceremonial or corporate display or exhibition or organized assemblage in any street or public place' there was the likelihood of a 'grave disturbance of the peace', the police commissioner could 'give such orders as to the conduct of the persons concerned towards each other and towards the public' as he thought necessary⁷⁵. Moreover, the police commissioner had the power to direct those whose movements he suspected of causing 'danger or alarm' or manifesting 'unlawful designs', to 'disperse and remove themselves' to any place within or outside the city that he might designate⁷⁶. Refusal to do so could result in their forcible deportation from the city by the police.

- 27 The powers of the police commissioner were also augmented in other ways. In particular, the new act vested the commissioner with wide discretionary powers with regard to the licensing of all commercial activities that were carried on in spaces designated as 'public'. Prior to the introduction of the act, the commissioner of police was bound by the law to issue a license to anyone applying for one. Now, however, he could refuse to grant licenses to those who were reckoned to possess 'a notoriously bad character'⁷⁷. In some circumstances, the act also allowed the police commissioner to exercise the judicial powers of a presidency magistrate⁷⁸.
- 28 It is not intended to suggest, of course, that such capacious formal powers were automatically translated into pervasive police surveillance on the ground. Nonetheless, the introduction of the new police act was to have significant consequences for the relationship between the police and local society. In particular, the 'special orders' for the 'preservation of order', the discretionary powers to license activities in public spaces as well as the strengthening of the punitive powers in relation to various categories of 'street offences', amplified the scale and dimension of the potential conflict between the police and the urban poor.

V. Policing the proletarian public sphere

- 29 One significant consequence of the 1902 act was that the vast discretionary powers vested in the commissioner of police and his immediate subordinates served to entrench them in a pivotal role within the politics of the urban neighbourhood and the street. Of course, colonial police officials had intervened from time to time in local disputes on an informal basis even before the passing of the 1902 act. But the police could now actively deploy the detailed and sweeping powers bestowed by the new act in dealing with recalcitrant elements. At the same time, those who rendered themselves useful to the police could reap the reward for their services by being granted 'favours' of various kinds, most notably, with regard to licenses for activities that now required police permission. Furthermore, by widening the discretionary powers of the police, the new act also predisposed the European upper ranks of the force to act on their anxieties about the threat to public order in an 'oriental' city and to intervene in local disputes in a manner hitherto unprecedented. The corollary to this, however, was that the police became more directly exposed and vulnerable to popular resentment on account of their actions.
- 30 The 'Muharram riots' that repeatedly rocked the city during the first decade of the twentieth century are illustrative of some of these themes⁷⁹. During the late 1890s, as noted previously, European police officers had increasingly begun to perceive the Muharram festival as a threat to public order on account of the seemingly 'licentious' and 'riotous' behavior of the lower classes who participated in the festival in large numbers⁸⁰. During the early years of the twentieth century, the powerlessness of the 'traditional' leaders in the face of these elements, and the inability of the police to adequately manipulate the informal sources of influence within the neighbourhood, precipitated a more direct application of force from above. Most notably, the police commissioner liberally deployed the 'special powers' bestowed by the 1902 act in an attempt to underscore British authority over the city.
- 31 The tensions over the conduct of the Moharram festival centered largely on Doctor Street, a locality that had been predominantly inhabited by the Sunni lower classes until the 1890s. The Bohras, who were of the Shi'asect, gradually began to move in to this street during the last decade of the century. By the turn of the century the neighbourhood had come to be dominated by the houses and mosques of the Bohras, a reflection of the economic prosperity of this 'respectable' trading community⁸¹. It is likely that their economic and social superiority began to arouse resentment among their poorer neighbours, a feeling that was aggravated when the Bohras sought to assert their authority over Doctor Street by preventing the passage of the Muharram *tolis* through the locality.
- 32 On 23 March 1904, when a Muharram *tohi* made its way through Doctor Street 'playing music as is, and has been for many years, the custom in this street', they were set upon by a crowd of Bohras⁸². This incident prompted the police to immediately register its presence in the neighbourhood. The next night when another procession entered Doctor Street, a police party stationed outside the Bohra mosque stopped the music, resulting in a minor affray⁸³. Three days later a procession that set out from Rangari *moholla*, a neighbourhood predominantly inhabited

by Muslim labourers, was again prevented by the police from going into Doctor Street and stoned by the Bohras living in an adjacent street when they passed through that area. The Rangari *moholla* processionists retaliated by attacking any Bohras whom they encountered on the streets. As a punitive measure, the police commissioner cancelled the festival license of the Rangari *moholla* and closed Doctor Street to all street processions for the remainder of the festival⁸⁴. The decision by the police to ban processions from passing through Doctor Street provoked widespread resentment among the adjacent neighbourhoods⁸⁵. The mood was thus sullen when the festival ended and shortly thereafter, popular anger against the Bohras of Doctor Street exploded into a riot in which the community was targeted for attack. Enraged crowds repeatedly surged through Bohra-dominated neighbourhoods in symbolic acts of violation of their territorial space⁸⁶. Bohras were attacked on the streets and the police were stoned at various points, prompting the police commissioner to call for military aid in suppressing the violence⁸⁷.

33 The tensions opened up by the riot of 1904 continued to simmer in the following years. In 1906, the Bohras of Doctor Street petitioned the police to use the special powers bestowed by the 1902 act to prevent the Muharram *tolis* from passing through the street between the fifth and final night of the festival⁸⁸. Police officials responded favourably to the Bohra petition and stationed a large contingent of policemen in Doctor Street during the festival in 1907. Their actions stoked the embers of popular resentment and eventually led to an even bigger conflagration in 1908. The riots that year were triggered by an affray involving a Julaha procession and some Sunnis who were praying in their mosque on Falkland Road on the immersion day⁸⁹. The police arrested three of the Sunnis allegedly involved in the incident, the news of which spread rapidly through the city. As a mark of protest many of the *tolis* refused to proceed with their *tabuts* and proceeded to attack both Bohras and the police⁹⁰. The law-enforcement agencies resorted to firing to clear the streets, resulting in forty-three casualties⁹¹.

34 In 1909, the Government of Bombay appointed a Muharram committee to coordinate with the police in maintaining peace during the festival⁹². The members of the committee were mostly drawn from amongst the traditional sources of authority in the various Muslim-dominated neighbourhoods, as well as men who had attained a position in the world of commerce and industry⁹³. Although the festival that year passed off without any violence, it became apparent that these elites had very little control over those who participated in the celebrations⁹⁴. S.M. Edwardes, who assumed charge as police commissioner in that year, was extremely critical of the government decision to appoint the Muharram committee. The Bombay executive authorities, in his view, 'had failed to prove that they are the ultimate masters of the city'. As a result, the street gangs had turned the festival into 'an orgy of license, obscenity and disturbance'⁹⁵. The following year, Edwardes set about using his special powers to crush the threat posed by the street gangs during the festival. He announced that although processions would be allowed to pass through Doctor Street, no music whatsoever would be permitted while they were there⁹⁶. As news of this decision spread many of the leading neighbourhoods protested by refusing to take out their *tabuts*⁹⁷. The *toli* leaders of these neighbourhoods also sent a petition to the government accusing Edwardes of being partial to the Bohras⁹⁸. Although there was no overt violence, Edwardes' actions intensified the antagonism between the police and the Muharram *tolis*⁹⁹.

35 The friction produced by the actions of the executive authorities led to an open confrontation in 1911. As we have seen, the special powers of the 1902 act allowed the police commissioner to prescribe the routes for processions. Invoking these powers, Edwardes presented the Muharram *tolis* with a precise processional route map that precluded them from venturing into Doctor Street and the adjacent Bohra-dominated localities. Once again, the police commissioner's decision provoked popular resentment in the Sunnilocalities and many of the neighbourhoods refused to apply for festival licenses. His active role in intervening in the conduct of the festival lent further credence to the popular perception amongst the lower orders that the police commissioner had been 'bribed' by wealthy Bohras¹⁰⁰. But Edwardes' decision also opened up dissensions within the various neighbourhoods over the question of

applying to the commissioner for a festival license. The internal conflict between the various Sunni neighbourhoods erupted in violence on the penultimate night of the festival, prompting Edwardes to call in the military. While this dispersed the crowds, it also sparked off a riot on the final afternoon of the festival as protestors clashed with the police and the military. The troops resorted to firing, killing twenty persons and injuring scores of others¹⁰¹.

36 In the aftermath of the riot of 1911, Edwardes made out a case for redefining rather than merely regulating the nature of the Moharram celebrations in the interests of public order. Specifically, he proposed doing away with the *tolis*, which were 'merely an excuse for rascality to burst its usual barriers and flow over in the city in a current of excessive turbulence'. To this end, Edwardes invoked his 'special powers' and issued a new set of Muharram regulations in 1912 that prohibited all *tolis* throughout the festival. The lifting and circulation of *tabuts* on the final night of the festival was to be strictly confined to the limits of the respective neighbourhoods in which each *tabut* was placed and the appearance of any *tabut* in defiance of this rule was to be considered 'an act of disobedience'. As in the previous year, all the Bohra localities were closed off entirely to all Muharram celebrants throughout the ten days of the festival. Finally, a deposit of hundred rupees for good behaviour was now made mandatory for all those who wished to procure Muharram licenses¹⁰². To give effect to these regulations, on the eve of the festival Edwardes used his powers as a presidency magistrate to remand to judicial custody 'all persons known to have been involved in the Muharram disturbances and to be likely to foment disorder'¹⁰³. Consequently, an absence of the usual carnival atmosphere and the throngs of people on the streets marked the festival of 1912. Most of the *mohollas* had decided against building any *tabuts* as a mark of collective protest as soon as the new regulations were issued¹⁰⁴. 'Taking it all in all', Edwardes wrote in a self-congratulatory vein, 'the *badmash* element felt itself outclassed and except in the case of Madanpura... contented itself with lying low and hurling threats and objurgation at the Police Commissioner.' At the same time, he pointed out that the most noteworthy feature was 'the rise in the number of "Majlis" at which the Maulvis discourse nightly on religious matters and the very great increase in the number of Mahomedans attending them'. 'Religion took the place this year of irreligion', Edwardes declared, 'order and tranquillity reigned in the place of riot'¹⁰⁵.

37 The discretionary powers bestowed by the new act also rendered the police an increasingly obtrusive presence in the quotidian functioning of the proletarian secondary economy. Of course, the urban poor had been vulnerable to police action even prior to the passing of the 1902 act¹⁰⁶. However, this trend increased dramatically after the new act strengthened the provisions relating to street offences. The commissioner of police commented with satisfaction on the fact that the police showed 'great activity' in working the new act, 'especially with regard to the sections dealing with street nuisance, street obstruction, and squatter cases'¹⁰⁷. Indeed, a majority of the cognizable cases reported by the police commissioner in the annual police statistics in the decade following the introduction of the new act involved offences such as 'street obstruction', 'public nuisances', gambling, 'loitering' in public thoroughfares and drunken and 'disorderly' behaviour. The victims in the majority of instances were petty hawkers, cart men, prostitutes, beggars and vagrants.

38 The very structural weaknesses of the Bombay police impelled the zealous targetting of petty street offences. For a numerically challenged, over-worked and poorly-equipped force, petty street offences involving the poor provided an attractive alternative to the more strenuous task of chasing up serious crimes against person and property. At the same time, such petty cases also helped to inflate police crime statistics, an imperative of no mean significance in a bureaucratic system that set great store by numbers. As Edwardes acknowledged 'it has been the practice among Superintendents here, if they found their number of Local Act cases in their divisions falling below the average to immediately whip up their subordinates and swamp the Courts with petty cases before the end of the year with the sole object of bringing up the figures'¹⁰⁸. Indeed, a preponderance of petty cases in the annual crime returns was frequently cited as evidence of the greater vigilance and vigour of the police¹⁰⁹. In turn, the high incidence of petty street offences also enabled the police to demand more resources to enforce the law

fully. Thus, the police commissioner argued in 1903 that 'in a large and populous city there is great scope for Police action in such cases', and added that 'the large number of such cases taken up by the Police is no criterion of what could be done if I had a larger force to deal with them'¹¹⁰.

Equally, however, the pressure asserted by indigenous middle-class 'public opinion' was also responsible for police action against the casual economies of the street. Indian educated elites became increasingly vocal adherents to the colonial doctrine of 'public nuisances', and favoured strong police action against aspects of proletarian street culture that were deemed to be antithetical to the code of 'respectability'. Indeed, local newspapers frequently brought pressure to bear on the police to suppress activities such as prostitution and gambling that were ostensibly the innate vices of the lower orders¹¹¹.

At the same time, the attempts of urban law enforcement agencies to enforce their authority over the proletarian public realm, and the resistance of affected sections of the poor to such intervention, transformed the street into a site of conflict between the police and many sections of the urban poor. Hawkers, for instance, were constantly engaged in a running battle with the police. According to the police commissioner, these 'petty hawkers whose sole possession appears to be a small basket of fruit or vegetables' when presented before the Magistrate, 'produce the basket which is about a foot or a foot and a half in diameter and are consequently treated lightly by the Magistrate who punish them with fines ranging from two annas to a rupee'¹¹². In some instances, hawkers arrested by the police 'produced evidence to show they were sitting just outside the market and they had paid certain sums to the Municipality for the privilege', leaving magistrates with no option but to acquit them¹¹³. As late as 1922, an exasperated Police Commissioner was complaining that the fines inflicted on hawkers did not prevent them from paying them and hastening 'back to their perch to repeat the offence the minute they get away from Court'. 'They know fully well', he added, 'that the Police cannot spare men to arrest them everyday and they look on fines as merely rent for the use of the road which can be easily be paid out of the profits'¹¹⁴. 'Beggars' proved to be equally elusive targets. As we have seen earlier, deportation came to be favoured as a means of ridding the city of beggars and 'pauper' immigrants. In the long run, however, police officials grew disillusioned with this strategy¹¹⁵.

Resistance to the police did not merely take the form of evasion. From time to time, the poor also assaulted constables patrolling the street. For instance, on 13 January Keroo Sakharam was produced at the Police Courts under the charge of being 'drunk and disorderly' in which state he and his friends were said to have attacked Govind Madhu, a police constable, while the latter was on duty¹¹⁶. In another such incident on the night of 17 May 1905, Mulloo Jiwanji and three of his friends, all South Indian migrants, were accused of being drunk and assaulting a constable on a public thoroughfare. In convicting the accused, the magistrate noted that 'such assaults upon the police were becoming frequent'¹¹⁷. 'The police constable is always regarded as a fair quarry by the roughs of the city', rued Edwardes in 1910, 'and only recently I have had occasion to order the constables in a certain portion of the E division to patrol in a party of 3 or 4 in order to avoid ill-treatment and rough usage in the performance of their duties'¹¹⁸.

It is not intended to suggest, of course, that the relationship between the police and the poor came to be defined solely by conflict. It has been argued recently that the lower ranks of the police force were drawn from the same social base as the working classes of the city and that both were mutually implicated in relations of reciprocity¹¹⁹. At the same time, however, the 'reciprocity' that ostensibly informed the relationship between the police and the poor was ultimately based upon an asymmetric power equation. Indeed, it is for this reason that the ordinary constable was a much-reviled figure on the street and the city's police force lacked legitimacy among Bombay's lower orders.

VI. Conclusion

The turn of the twentieth century marked a crucial watershed in the history of public order policing in colonial India. Prior to the 1890s the colonial state had largely focused on the pacification of the Indian countryside. But as the nineteenth century drew to a close, it was in

the towns of the Raj that the maintenance of 'public order' became an increasingly pressing issue. This was especially so in the old Presidency capitals of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay where the dynamics of industrial urbanization began to generate new problems of social control for the ruling authorities¹²⁰. In colonial Bombay, the outbreak of large-scale urban riots during the 1890s as well as the rapid growth of a proletarian 'secondary economy' and culture centred on the street, precipitated a shift in colonial policing strategies. Most notably, the traditional colonial strategy of 'indirect' control began to give way to a more intrusive approach *vis-à-vis* the urban neighbourhoods and an emergent proletarian public sphere. In particular, this essay has highlighted the salience of the 1902 police act, which vastly enhanced the discretionary powers of the police over a range of 'public' activities and spaces that had hitherto been unregulated. Their newly consolidated powers, in turn, increased the scale and dimensions of the conflict between the colonial police and the urban poor. Consequently, the relationship between the colonial administration and the proletarian public realm in Bombay grew markedly fractious in the years leading up to the Great War.

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Notes

- 3 Reiner (2000, p. 170).
- 4 On policing and public order in nineteenth-century Europe, see especially Gatrell (1990); Lüdtke, (1979); and Spencer (1992). For explorations of this theme in the colonial context see, in particular, Arnold (1986); McCracken (1986, pp. 127-148); Anderson (1994); Anderson, Killingray (1991; 1992).
- 5 Yang (1986) and more recently Chandavarkar (1998, p. 181).
- 6 Yang (1986).
- 7 See, for instance, Chandavarkar (1998); Gooptu (2001).
- 8 Chandavarkar (1998, p. 181).
- 9 Arnold (1986).
- 10 Chandavarkar (1998).
- 11 Gooptu (2001, pp. 111-139).
- 12 Chandavarkar (1994, pp. 76-77).
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 461-505.
- 14 Royal Commission on Indian Labour: Memorandum from the Government of Bombay (Bombay, 1929), p. 3.
- 15 Upadhyay (1990, p. 87); Chaudhury (1992, pp. 12-41).
- 16 On the widespread use of casual labour in Bombay's industries, see Chandavarkar (1994, pp. 72-123).
- 17 *Ibid.*, pp. 77-80.

18 Masselos (1979, p. 164).

19 Among those who were killed during the riots there were 46 Muslims and 33 Hindus and one Jew who died accidentally in police firing. While the occupations of thirty persons killed in the rioting could not be ascertained, of the remainder a majority were drawn from the labouring classes. These details are culled from *The Bombay Riots of 1893: Reprinted from the Times of India* (henceforth *Bombay Riots*) (Bombay, 1893) and *The Mahomedan and Hindu Riots In Bombay, August 1893: From The Bombay Gazette* (henceforth *Mahomedan and Hindu Riots*), Second edition, (Bombay, 1893).

20 Mahomedan and Hindu Riots, p. 1.

21 *Times of India* (henceforth *TOI*), 10 March 1898. Five members of the crowd were killed during the firing.

22 Commissioner of Police, Bombay to the Secretary, JD, Bombay, 1 April 1898, Government of Bombay (henceforth *GOB*), General Department (Plague Branch), 1898, Vol. 389, Compilation no. 298, para. 18, Maharashtra State Archives (henceforth *MSA*), Bombay.

23 *Ibid.*, para. 27.

24 *TOI*, 10 March 1898.

25 Government Resolution on Report of Commissioner of Police, Bombay, *GOB*, Judicial, 1893, Vol. 194, Compilation no. 948, part I, *MSA*.

26 Bombay Presidency Police: Secret Abstracts of Intelligence (henceforth *BPPSAI*), VI: 38, 1893, para. 1716.

27 *Indian Textile Journal* (henceforth *ITJ*), III: 36, September 1893, p. 245.

28 Edwardes (1923, p. 85).

29 For instance, the police were out in force in the mill areas when workers in some cotton mills went on strike in June 1897. *BPPSAI*, X: 24, 1897, para. 899. Similarly, three years later, when the cotton mills resorted to working short time and reduced the wages of their workers, the police were regularly called in to break the strikes that followed. See, for instance, *BPPSAI*, XIII: 2, 1900, para. 123; *BPPSAI*, XIII: 3, 1900, para. 179.

30 For an account of the colonial stereotypes about the innate religious bigotry of some north Indian Muslim communities, see Pandey (1992).

31 Minute by Mr. Campbell in *Report On Increase In Police Force Recommended by Commissioner of Police (10 September 1893)*, *GOI*, Home (Police), August 1894, nos. A. 117-146, p. 819, Oriental and India Office Collections (henceforth *OIOC*), British Library, London.

32 Chairman, Plague Committee, Bombay, to the Secretary, *GD* (Plague), 18 March 1898, *GOB*, General (Plague), 1898, Vol. 388, Compilation no. 297, para. 3, *MSA*.

33 Brogden (1982, p. 44).

34 Chandavarkar (1994, p. 76).

35 For a contemporary official account of aspects of this culture, see Edwardes (1912).

36 For instance, it was estimated in 1898 that 'around 100,000 labourers usually slept on roads or footpaths'. *TOI*, 22 October 1898. Cited in Masselos (1996, p. 52). See also, Chandavarkar (1998, p. 103).

37 *Ibid.*

38 *Ibid.*, p. 147; pp. 159-163. See also Gooptu (2001, pp. 111-112; 126-132).

39 See, for instance, the reports in *Bombay Riots* and *Mahomedan and Hindu Riots*; also Masselos (1993, pp. 182-188).

40 This perception was probably strengthened by some of the incidents of street violence that occurred during the early 1890s. See, for instance, Masselos (1984, p. 45). See also, Edwardes (1923, pp. 93-94).

41 Douglas (1882, pp. 24-30). See also Masselos (1982, p. 53).

42 *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58. Hindus, especially the lower castes, participated in large numbers in the festival, which had come to be known amongst them as *Imam jayanti*. Native Opinion, 1 July 1894, *RNNP*, 27, 1894, para. 26.

43 Edwardes (1923, p. 182).

44 *TOI*, 1 November 1884. Cited in Masselos (1982, p. 54); see also Douglas (1882, pp. 22-30).

45 Masselos (1982, p. 58).

46 On the colonial construction of 'criminal tribes', see Nigam (1990a, 1990b); Major (1999); Brown (2001).

47 Annual Report of Police for the Town and Island of Bombay (hereafter *ARPB*) for the year 1899 (Bombay, 1900), para. 107.

48 For an interesting discussion of this theme, see Masselos (1996, pp. 25-60).

- 49 GOB, General (Plague), 1899, Vol. 704, Compilation no. 622, p. 77, para. 3, MSA.
- 50 Commissioner of Police, Bombay, to Secretary, JD, Bombay, 23 July 1898, GOB, Judicial, 1901, Vol. 105, Compilation no. 1991, para. 7, MSA.
- 51 GOB, Judicial, 1901, Vol. 105, Compilation no. 1991, MSA. For a recent analysis, see Masselos (1996).
- 52 *Gazetteer of Bombay City and Island*, compiled by S.M. Edwardes (henceforth *Gazetteer*), 3 vols. (Bombay, 1909), II, pp. 238-245.
- 53 Chandavarkar, (1998, p. 185).
- 54 It was reported in 1906 that the rates of pay of the native constabulary had 'practically remained stationary since the year 1865'. L.B. Souter, Acting Commissioner of Police, Bombay, to Under Secretary, JD, Bombay, 7 July 1906, GOI, Home (Police), February 1907, nos. A. 23-24, para. 3, OIOC.
- 55 On the reductions to the police force, see Acting Secretary, JD, Bombay, to Secretary, GOI, Home (Police), 16 June 1893, GOI, Home (Police), June 1893, no. A-199, pp. 3-6.
- 56 *Gazetteer*, II, p. 245.
- 57 GOI, Home (Police), February 1910, nos. 39-41, Accompaniment No.1, OIOC.
- 58 Commissioner of Police, Bombay, to Secretary, JD, Bombay, 22 February 1910, GOB, Judicial, April 1910, no. A. 9, para. 2, OIOC.
- 59 *Ibid.*, para. 15.
- 60 For a detailed discussion of these structural constraints, see Chandavarkar (1998, pp. 184-207).
- 61 *Ibid.*, pp. 1279-1305, OIOC.
- 62 Catanach (1992, pp. 200-201).
- 63 Masselos (1976, pp. 78-81). Many of these so-called 'traditional' leaders derived their status from the recognition bestowed upon them by the colonial administration.
- 64 Catanach (1992, pp. 200-201).
- 65 MCRP, 1899, I, passim.
- 66 Masselos (1976, p. 79). For an extended discussion of these social relations of the neighbourhood, see Chandavarkar (1998, pp. 100-142).
- 67 Commissioner of Police, Bombay, to Secretary, JD, Bombay, 24 September 1914, GOI, Home (Police), December 1915, nos. A. 96-108, para. 4, OIOC.
- 68 Chandavarkar (1998, pp. 192-193).
- 69 The demand for a new police act for Bombay had frequently emanated from the European officials who manned the upper ranks of the police force during the 1890s, but it was not until the end of the century that the proposal to draft a new city police bill finally received official sanction. See, GOB, Judicial, January 1902, Progs No. A-46, p. 221, OIOC.
- 70 *Bombay Act No. IV*, Chapter III, section 23.
- 71 *Ibid.*, section 121.
- 72 *Ibid.*, Chapter I, section 3.
- 73 *Ibid.*, section 23 (3).
- 74 *Ibid.*, section 23 (2).
- 75 *Ibid.*, section 25 (1).
- 76 *Ibid.*, section 27.
- 77 *Ibid.*, section 22 (3).
- 78 *Ibid.*, section 56 (1).
- 79 A contemporary official account of these riots is to be found in Edwardes (1923). For a more recent scholarly analysis, see Masselos (1976, 1982). Colonial officials and contemporary observers tended to attribute the riots to the timeless sectarian antipathy between the city's Shi'as and Sunnis in the city. On the other hand, recent scholarly accounts, while cognizant of the culpability of the colonial state, have not located the police role in these riots within the wider context of their newly enhanced powers.
- 80 See, for instance, Commissioner of Police, Bombay, to Secretary, JD, Bombay, 5 July 1895, GOB, Judicial, Abstract of Proceedings, 16 July 1895, MSA.
- 81 Commissioner of Police, Bombay, to Acting Chief Secretary, JD, Bombay, 12 April 1904, GOB, Judicial, April 1904, no. 25, para. 3, MSA. The Bohras had a reputation for being 'excellent businessmen' who were 'engaged in every branch of trade and commerce', *Gazetteer*, I, p. 181.
- 82 Commissioner of Police, Bombay, to Acting Chief Secretary, JD, Bombay, 12 April 1904, GOB, Judicial, April 1904, no. 25, para. 3, MSA.
- 83 *Ibid.*, para. 4.

- 84 The commissioner justified his decision by arguing that the Rangari *moholla* had a previous history of violence and that it was 'notorious for being composed of turbulent persons ever ready and eager to have a fracas with other processionists on the slightest pretext'; *ibid.*, para. 9.
- 85 *Ibid.*, para. 11.
- 86 *Ibid.*, para. 14.
- 87 *Ibid.*, para. 15.
- 88 Petition from Vohra Mahomedan inhabitants of Doctor Street to S.W. Edgerley, Chief Secretary, Bombay, 27 February 1906, GOB, Judicial, 1906, Vol. 160, Compilation no. 555, para. 8, MSA.
- 89 Commissioner of Police, Bombay, to Secretary, JD, Bombay, 25 February 1908, GOB, Judicial, March 1908, no. A. 20, paras. 4-6, MSA.
- 90 *Ibid.*, paras. 8-13.
- 91 *Ibid.*, pp. 769-770.
- 92 *TOI*, 6 January 1909; *BG*, 7 January 1909.
- 93 Masselos (1976, p. 84).
- 94 Commissioner of Police, Bombay, to Secretary, JD, Bombay, 24 September 1914, GOI, Home (Police), December 1915, nos. A. 96-108, para. 5, OIOC.
- 95 *Ibid.*
- 96 Masselos (1976, p. 85).
- 97 Commissioner of Police, Bombay, to Secretary, JD, Bombay, 24 October 1911, Bombay Confidential Proceedings, Judicial Department, November 1910, no. A. 3, para. 3, OIOC.
- 98 Petition from Syed Yacub Mahomed and others of Rangari Moholla, Bapu Hajare Moholla, Kasai Moholla, and Mazagon, GOB, Judicial, Vol. 182, Compilation no. 571, 1910, p. 193, MSA.
- 99 Indu Prakash, 25 January 1910, *RNNP*, 5, 1910, para. 55.
- 100 *Ibid.*, para. 8.
- 101 *Ibid.*, para. 14.
- 102 Commissioner of Police, Bombay, to Secretary, JD, Bombay, 23 August 1911, GOB, Bombay Confidential Proceedings, Judicial Department, October 1911, no. A. 2, para. 6, OIOC.
- 103 Commissioner of Police, Bombay, to Secretary, JD, Bombay, 6 January 1912, GOB, Bombay Confidential Proceedings, Judicial Department, January 1912, no. A. 4, para. 6, OIOC.
- 104 *Ibid.*, para. 2.
- 105 *Ibid.*, para. 7.
- 106 *ARPB*, 1892 (Bombay, 1893), para. 10; *ARPB*, 1899 (Bombay, 1900), para. 14.
- 107 *ARPB*, 1903 (Bombay, 1904), para. 17.
- 108 *ARPB*, 1909 (Bombay, 1910), para. 3.
- 109 *ARPB*, 1925 (Bombay, 1926), para. 5.
- 110 *ARPB*, 1903 (Bombay, 1904), para. 17.
- 111 See, for instance, Jam-e-Jamshed, 2 January 1904, *RNNP*, 1, 1904, para. 21; *Indian Social Reformer*, 11 June 1910, *RNNP*, 24, 1910, para. 38.
- 112 F.M. Gadney, Commissioner of Police, Bombay, to Municipal Commissioner, Bombay, 20 June 1913, GOB, Judicial, July 1914, no. A. 44, para. 2, MSA.
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- 114 *ARPB*, 1922 (Bombay, 1900), para. 5.
- 115 *ARPB*, 1921 (Bombay, 1922), para. 14.
- 116 *BG*, 13 January 1905.
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- 118 S.M. Edwardes, Commissioner of Police, Bombay, to Secretary, JD, Bombay, 22 February 1910, GOB, Judicial, April 1910, no. A. 9, p. 543, para. 5, OIOC.
- 119 Chandavarkar (1998, pp. 181, 227). Undoubtedly, this was one of the reasons why police action against the so-called 'low life of the bazaar' often yielded meagre results. See, for instance, Edwardes (1924, pp. 118-119).
- 120 For an analysis of sectarian riots and labour strikes in Calcutta during the 1890s, see Chakrabarty (1989) and Basu (1998). On the growing challenges of urban policing in the Madras Presidency from 1900 onwards, see Arnold (1986).

Pour citer cet article

Référence électronique

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Prashant Kidambi is Lecturer in South Asian History (School of Historical Studies, University of Leicester). He has published 'Housing the poor in a colonial city: the Bombay Improvement Trust, 1898-1918'. *Studies in History*, 17, 1, NS, 2001, pp. 57-79; 'An infection of Locality': Plague, Pythogenesis and the Poor in Colonial Bombay, c. 1896-1905'. *Urban History* (forthcoming). His current research explores the social history of industrial urbanization, colonial governance and the emergence of civil society in modern South Asia and especially in the context of Bombay during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a period when the port town was transformed into a major colonial metropolis.

Droits d'auteur

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Abstract / Résumé

The turn of the twentieth century marked an important watershed in the history of urban 'public order' policing in British India. This essay focuses on fin-de-siècle Bombay and describes how the anxieties provoked by rapid industrial urbanization and massive labour migration precipitated an important shift in colonial policing strategies. In particular, it highlights the significance of a new act, introduced in 1902 that vastly enhanced and consolidated the authority of the police over a range of sites and activities within an emergent 'proletarian public sphere'. The wide discretionary powers vested in the police by the new act, it is argued, amplified the scale and dimensions of the potential friction between the police and the urban poor in the years leading up to the First World War.

Le tournant du XX^e siècle se caractérise par une importante rupture de l'histoire du maintien de l'ordre public urbain dans l'Inde britannique. Cet article, consacré à la Bombay de la fin du siècle, décrit cette importante évolution des stratégies policières coloniales, précipitée par l'anxiété que suscitaient l'urbanisation et l'industrialisation rapides ainsi que l'arrivée massive de travailleurs. Il éclaire en particulier le sens d'une nouvelle loi, promulguée en 1902, et qui accroissait et renforçait énormément les pouvoirs de police pour tout un ensemble de lieux et d'activités relevant d'une «sphère publique prolétarienne» émergente. Le pouvoir discrétionnaire étendu que la nouvelle loi conférait à la police eut, selon nous, pour effet d'amplifier les frictions entre la police et les habitants pauvres des villes dans les années précédant la Première Guerre mondiale.

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